

VZCZCXRO9503

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0577
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1426
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2402
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000452

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EUR/ACE, SCA/PPD, ECA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: MEETING DIRECTLY WITH MINISTER OF EDUCATION
BEST WAY TO CIRCUMVENT BAYRAMOV ROADBLOCK

REF: A. ASHGABAT 0396

[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 0249

[1](#)C. ASHGABAT 0375

[1](#)1. (SBU) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a follow-up to Charge's recent meeting with the Minister of Education (Ref. A), PAO gave a tailored presentation on U.S. Government-funded programs that send Turkmen students to two American-style universities in the region. The presentation proved to be a success at getting information directly to the Minister and circumventing the known roadblock, the Ministry's anti-Western International Relations Director Nury Bayramov. In the end, the Minister agreed not to interfere in the programs, but fell short of approving them. Perhaps most importantly, the meeting revealed what might be the very beginning of a marginalization of Bayramov's influence. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND TO A NEAR REVERSAL

[1](#)3. (SBU) On April 3, PAO met with Minister of Education Muhammetgeldi Annaamanov to present him directly with information on scholarship programs for the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) and Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics, and Strategic Planning (KIMEP, by its Russian acronym), on behalf of implementing partner American Councils/ACCELS. Post had learned that the Ministry of Education (MOE) was likely to interfere for the second time with standardized testing for the two university scholarship programs. Similar to previous meetings with the Ministry of Education, post believes that a key Ministry official, International Relations Department Head Nury Bayramov, deliberately delayed the meeting to inconvenience the program organizers (Ref. B).

[1](#)4. (SBU) As often reported, post has good reason to believe that Bayramov is the principle obstacle to cooperation in education - and European embassies and EU-TACIS fully agree. He has used his position to hoard information and manipulate the current and past Ministers of Education. What distinguishes Minister Annaamanov from his predecessors is that he was appointed by President

Berdimuhamedov with a mandate to reform education and increase international exchanges, including with the United States. Despite the orders from above, Bayramov has managed to manipulate or filter information and access in a way that has kept Annaamanov ill-informed and suspicious of U.S. exchanges and educational programs (Ref. C).

IMPRESSING THE MINISTER WITH FACTS... AND POWER POINT

15. (SBU) In the meeting, PAO used a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted the success stories of several graduates from both universities and was intended to persuade the Minister that sending Turkmen students could only be beneficial. It worked. Following the presentation, the Minister expressed his regret that Turkmenistan's law currently prohibits recognition of degrees from any private institutions in the CIS, but added that this was outdated and in need of reform. He suggested that when education legislation is reviewed, he would seek the recognition of degrees from universities like AUCA and KIMEP. The Minister was almost apologetic as he tried to explain that they needed programs like the two the PAO described, but that private colleges and universities with little credibility had sprung up across the former Soviet Union like mushrooms.

16. (SBU) PAO also presented to the Minister a copy of the diplomatic note first announcing the new scholarship program in September 2007. The Minister sheepishly asked the PAO, "And what response did you receive?" When PAO said "none", the Minister shook his head with an expression of apology and angrily glanced towards Bayramov.

NO APPROVAL, BUT NO INTERFERENCE

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17. (SBU) The Minister said the legal recognition of degrees issue prevents his government from approving the scholarship programs. When pressed by PAO, the Minister said that the Ministry would not support the programs, but would not prevent students from applying independently to these programs or to other universities abroad.

18. (SBU) Unfortunately, the lack of Ministry approval also meant that the government would not approve use of a hotel conference room for testing, or provide the letters of invitation needed for visas for two KIMEP representatives to administer the testing in person. Post subsequently moved the testing into the smaller and barely adequate space of the Information Resource Center (IRC), which is controlled by the Embassy. ACCELS obtained last minute permission from KIMEP to administer the tests themselves.

OUTSTANDING ISSUE

19. (SBU) PAO then highlighted for the Minister post's over one-year-old request to implement the "Shaping the Way we Teach English" seminar for Turkmenistan's English Teachers. Although the government officially approved the program in September 2007, Bayramov had managed to delay any real implementation for months. When the Minister looked through the copy of the year-old dipnote handed to him by the PAO, he sternly asked Bayramov why the program hadn't been implemented. After Bayramov's apologetic reply, the Minister looked Bayramov in the eye and in a serious tone said, "I'm giving this back to you, but I don't want to see it disappear!"

110. (SBU) COMMENT: Post had long-suspected that Minister Annaamanov would be amenable to closer cooperation and supportive of our educational exchanges if Nury Bayramov was not filtering information. This meeting was the first confirmation that our suspicion was true. We certainly do not yet want to declare victory, but we are encouraged that the timid Minister of Education is finally beginning to assert himself over his malevolent "minder," Bayramov. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND